

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW – PART NINE

As Jesus' disciples listened to some amazing new ideas in chapters 5-7, almost certainly the big question in their minds would have been, 'Will it work?'. So He showed them. In the next two chapters Jesus gave a powerful series of demonstrations of the Sermon on the Mount in action. We might call it the Sermon on the Job. First He performed three miracles which represented three simple steps in changing people's lives.

Leprosy in the Bible illustrates sin. It is an infection which attacks the nerves of sensation in the skin so that the sufferer becomes insensitive to the world around and consequently damaged, ugly and isolated. Sin does the same. It quietly creeps up on us, making us less and less aware of the needs of those around, and eventually more and more lonely. In Jesus' time, as in most cultures even now, lepers were pushed out of society. No-one even touched them. So when He reached out and touched the leper He was listening not to a nervous society but to an inner God-given confidence that He had nothing to fear but much to give. The first result of contact with Jesus was cleansing from his disease, just as the first result for us is cleansing from sin.(I Jn.1:7,9) There is no way God can bless us effectively until our sin is forgiven. Once a leper is healed, he still faces what is often an even harder problem, to re-enter society. As sinners we face the same problem. People see us for what we were, not what we now are in Christ. Jesus instructed him to fulfil the Old Testament law.(Lev.13:49; 14:2) Sacrifice to God in the Bible is always a picture of the cross of Christ where cleansing from sin occurs. Once the requirements of the Law had been met, he would be accepted by his people again.(8:1-4)

Walking in the Bible pictures daily living.(II Cor.5:7; Col.2:6) Paralysis therefore symbolises inability to walk or live the way God wants. It often extends to feeling unable to come to Jesus for help because we are conscious of being so unworthy. The servant had a master and good friend prepared to go on his behalf. Often we too need a good friend to begin the process for us. The centurion understood what most of the Jews of that day, and we today, failed to grasp. He recognised that the question was simply one of authority. In the Roman army his chain of command went all the way up to the Emperor. Jesus as the King from heaven had only to say and it would be enough. The secret of us walking in the Christian life is exactly the same. If Jesus says it in His word and my heart, and I believe Him, I will live the way He wants, in His strength for just as long as I go on trusting Him. The day of judgement will not be about whether I know the Bible but whether I trusted Him to live it through me.(8:5-13)

Imagine the excitement and then the disappointment of Peter's mother in law, first at the thought that Jesus was coming to her home, and then being too sick to get out of bed and prepare the house and the meal. Again a touch from Jesus restored her to normal so that she could serve Him. Being blessed by the presence of the King within us means three things. First we are clean and forgiven, second we can live His way in His strength and third we can serve Him among His people in whatever way He directs. These three life changing events opened the floodgates. People came from everywhere with their needs whether spiritual or physical. Jesus healed them to

demonstrate that He was the one promised in the Old Testament who would be able to do this.(8:14-17)

The idea of following Jesus was beginning to catch on but it seemed that some potential disciples had misconceptions about what it would mean to be a follower of Jesus. There were those who thought following Him was about a place where He would be based, an address from which they could come and go. Others saw following as being about times, perhaps 9-5pm, five days a week. He explained to would-be disciples that they would be on duty everywhere and at every time. It may well be that the father the man asked about was still alive and well and that he was thinking of a distant future career when circumstances changed.(8:18-22)

Continuing the theme of what was in store for future disciples, Jesus took His followers for a sail on the Sea of Galilee, knowing from heaven what the weather forecast was. As a terrible storm built up, He went to sleep and they panicked even though they were the experienced sailors. When they had exhausted their skill and courage they woke Jesus as their last resort. As Creator of the universe, including the wind and the sea, He took charge and the storm stopped. They had discovered a little more of who He was. He rebuked them for their lack of faith, not because they should have known He would stop the storm but because they should have trusted Him from the start. Life storms will seem to overwhelm us at times until we remember who He is, what He promises and where He is – in us, but not asleep.(8:23-27)

Being a disciple of Jesus means that we have authority over the ruler of this world and his agents. The Devil does horrible things to those who open themselves to him but ‘greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.’(I Jn.4:4) Jesus demonstrated that He was King, the enemy retreated into a herd of pigs, but sadly the locals preferred their pigs to the King.(8:28-34)

After demonstrating His purpose in the lives of His people, the basis of discipleship, and His awesome power over creation and the Devil, Jesus moved on in chapter 9 to show His followers what to expect from a sample day in His service.

9:1-8 Q.1 How does this story build on the themes of 8:1-13? What has to happen before we can live the way He wants?

9:9-17 Q.2 What were the first effects of Matthew becoming a follower of Jesus? What was the first objection He faced to His ministry? How did He answer? How do we face the same objection today? What was the second objection He faced? What three answers did He give? How do they link together into a summary of His message? How do they apply now? How do we face the same objection?

9:18-31 Q.3 How did Jesus respond to an impossible request? How did He cope when His urgent house call was delayed? Why did He not tell the woman to wait? How did He respond to ridicule?

9:32-38 Q.4 What does dumbness picture in the Bible?(Lk.1:20) So what does Jesus want from His disciples, not just for this man but for the world?